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# Journey with me unto the Divine Throne

N. Wahid Azal

هو العلي الاعلى تعالى ذكره



Figure 1: Siyyid 'Alī Muḥammad Shīrāzī, the *Bāb* (d. 1850) (Courtesy of the Bayānī community)

مَنْ عَرَفَ نَفْسَهُ فَقَدْ عَرَفَ إِمَامَهُ الَّذِي هُوَ رَبُّهُ

*Whosoever knows their Self, knows their Imām, who is their Lord! — Shaykhī-Bābī reiteration of the Delphic maxim (ours)*

أَنَا الْحَجَرُ الْمَكْرُومُ الَّتِي يَنْفَجِرُ مِنْهُ اثْتَانًا عَشْرَةً عَلَيْنَا

*I am the Philosopher's Stone from which has gushed forth Twelve Springs! — 'Alī (Khutba al-Bayān - my trans.)*

نَحْنُ وَاللَّهُ الْأَسْمَاءُ الْحُسْنَى الَّتِي لَا يُقْبِلُ اللَّهُ مِنَ الْعِبَادِ عَمَلاً إِلَّا يَمْعِرُ فِتْنَاهُ

We are, by God, the Most Beautiful Names without whom God does not accept any action of His servants except through Our gnosis! — Ja'far al-Ṣādiq (cf. Ibn Bābūya, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, bāb al-nawādir - my trans.)

The following piece constitutes a companion article to our previous one published in this journal.<sup>1</sup> It is also a revised version of an article we meant to publish somewhere in 2011 but instead withdrew from its originally planned venue and then self-published in its first, rough draft online. Besides minor corrections and some issues of proof-reading, style, transliteration and fixed references, there are very slight differences of emphases between this piece and the earlier one. That said, other than a few necessary asides, the historical and paradigmatic distinctions between Bābism, the religion of the Bayān, and Bahā'ism already covered will not be repeated here. Here instead we will be discussing the Bāb's theosophical alchemy, a perspective that may illuminate upon a few themes covered in the article on Ṣubḥ-i-Azal.

This theosophical alchemy of the Bāb's, we would argue, has as its focus the spiritual perfection of the soul of the initiated believer within the metaphysical reality of the Imām: the Imām who simultaneously acts as both the initiating guide of the *initiated believer* (*mu'min*) into the greater mysteries as well as being the ultimate goal of the *opus* itself. We will also several times be touching on the question of the *Imām-of-ones-being*<sup>2</sup> that is linked to this overall question, offering a somewhat more finessed and nuanced interpretation of its underlying meaning than what has been offered in recent years by some popular literature: an idea, although explicitly Alamūtī Ismā'īli in its coinage, is already latent within the esoteric teachings of the Imāms of Twelver Shī'ism and later in the Bāb. We hold that the subject of Shī'ite alchemy - and the soteriology undergirding it together with the esoteric metaphysics informing that - is ultimately inseparable from an adequate understanding of what this whole idea even means. We also suggest that this notion in no way, shape or manner implies the transformation of the base, concupiscent ego *qua* the base, concupiscent ego into the Imām; nor do

<sup>1</sup> ^“*Invoking the Seven Worlds: An acrostic prayer by Mīrzā Yahyā Nūrī Ṣubḥ-i-Azal*,” in *LUVĀH: Journal of the Creative Imagination*, Volume 4, June 2013.^

<sup>2</sup> For a popular treatment of the *Imām-of-ones-being*, see Peter Lamborn Wilson's *Scandal: Essays in Islamic Heresy* (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 1988). We caution our reader from taking this doctrine in the unfinessed way it has been presented in some popular sources lately as conclusive. For comparative purposes, the only non-Shī'i and non-Islamic source that may enumerate this core esoteric teaching of the Imāms – with some opacities on the Shī'i side still needing to be unpacked - may be considered to be the Poimandres of the Corpus Hermeticum.^

empty declarations as to the attainment of its status without the requisite initiation and the addendum spiritual wayfaring (*sulūk*) – the actual engagement in the alchemical *opus magnum* – make it so. Rather it entails the progressive stripping and erasure of the base, concupiscent ego wherein the soul finally becomes the Eternal Imām’s perfect mirror and place of repose. Additionally the notions of the Imām-of-ones-being and that of the Hiero-Intelligence (*‘aql*)<sup>3</sup> – and hence the Eternal Imām – are inseparable ones. In the metaphysical diction of Bābism this is all referred to as the Primal Will (*mashī'a al-ūlā*). This will be one of our guiding motifs throughout this piece.

In this present article here we will, first, offer a schematic biography of the Bāb himself. Then we will present a commentary on the polar motif guiding the inner intention of our main translated piece (i.e. a brief response by the Bāb on the *ars operativa*) together with some relevant comments regarding the place of *gematria*. This is followed by an exegesis on the symbolism of the alchemical ascension as it relates to our item together with some translations from the Bāb’s *Book of the Five Grades* and then final commentary on the concluding intention of the piece. After this we will detail the two MSS. used in our semi-critical translation and offer some remarks attempting to locate a timeline for the work before submitting an annotated translation of the text itself.<sup>4</sup>

## The Bāb

Siyyid ‘Alī Muḥammad Shīrāzī<sup>5</sup> (b. 1820<sup>6</sup> – d. 1850); known to posterity as the *Bāb* (“gate” or “threshold”), and per his own designation (among several other titles)<sup>7</sup> as the *Essence of the Seven Letters* (*dhāt ḥurūf al-saba'a*);<sup>8</sup> was an Iranian scion of the house of the Prophet

<sup>3</sup> ^The doctrine as taught in the Imāmī *akhbār* corpus beginning with the famous opening *ḥādīth* of *al-‘aql wa al-jahl* in Kulaynī’s “Book of the Hiero-Intelligence and ignorance” (*Kitāb al-‘Aql wa al-Jahl*) of his *al-Kāfi*; see especially as well Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi’s *The Divine Guide in Early Shi’ism: The Sources of Esotericism in Islam* trans. David Streight (Albany: The State University of New York Press, 1993) chp. 1, esp. 6-13 and *passim*.^

<sup>4</sup> ^The title of the piece derives from its sixteenth passage (see below).^

<sup>5</sup> ^We refer to the sources listed in n6 of our previous article.^

<sup>6</sup> ^This date is based on the 1st of Muḥarram 1236 AH (9 October 1820 CE) dating of the Bāb’s birthday held by the Bayānīs as the one correct rather than the 1st of Muḥarram 1235 AH (20 October 1819) cited by the Bahā’ís, see E.G. Browne *A Traveller’s Narrative Written to Illustrate the Episode of the Bāb* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1891), Volume 2, Note C: 221-2.^

<sup>7</sup> ^Including *Remembrance* (*dhikr*), the *Proof of God* (*ḥujjat’ullāh*), the *Primal Point* (*nuqtat al-ūlā*) and the *Supreme Lord* (*rabb al-a’lā*), to name a few.^

<sup>8</sup> ^He claimed this title, on its initial level, because his given name ‘Alī Muḥammad contains a total of seven letters in Arabic (i.e. ﷺ ﻂ ﻢ ﻊ ﻪ ﻢ ﻊ) that in its *abjad* numerical value as 202 is equivalent to *rabb* (lord). One of the lesser known reasons why the Bāb used this title in its specific phrasing to denote himself is because it indicates the seven independent sigils of the calligram of the Greatest Name (*ism al-a’zam*), namely:



. This symbol constitutes the supreme occult-magical cipher in the Islamic esoteric tradition and is believed to have been originally transmitted by the first Imām ‘Alī, see Georges Anawati *Le nom suprême de dieu (Ism Allāh al-A’zam)* in *Atti del III Congresso di Studi Arabi e Is-*

of Islam (i.e. a “*siyyid*”) who at the ripe age of twenty-four, in the middle of the nineteenth century, unleashed one of the most momentous (yet simultaneously most tragic) episodes in movements claiming chiliastic gnostic fulfilment and renewal in the history of Shi‘ite Islam since the Nizārī Ismā‘ilī Imām Ḥassan II ‘alā dhikrīhi salām had likewise undertaken a similar mission in his *qiyāma* proclamation at Alamūt in 1164 CE: events of striking resemblance and similarly meeting a tragic end, albeit not as intense, dramatic or wide ranging in the singularity of their fiercely violent *dénouement* as Bábism’s. During the six year period of his ministry from May 23<sup>rd</sup> 1844 in Shīrāz to his execution for heresy in Tabrīz on July 8<sup>th</sup> 1850, the Báb became for many thousands of his followers in Irāq and Iran the focus of intense adoration and, at once, the literal mouthpiece of the Hidden Imām of the Age; then the Imām of the Age or the *Resurrector* (*al-qā’im*) in person; and finally a new Theophany or manifestation of the Divinity (*mazhar allāh*) in his own right proclaiming the altogether abrogation of the (at the time 1270 year)<sup>9</sup> dispensational *aeon* of Islam and with it the inauguration of the cycle of the Bayān (exposition). Seeing himself in the same *theophanological* league as (and even greater than) the Abrahamic messenger-lawgivers who had preceded him - such as Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muḥammad - this Bayānic cycle was deemed by him to last for a duration of anywhere from between 1511 to 2001 years just as the Islamic dispensation had itself lasted in this scheme for 1270 years.<sup>10</sup>

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*lamici* (Ravello 1-6 September 1966) 1967: 7-58. For example, the phrasing *dhāt ḥurūf al-saba‘ā* can itself be found in reference to these seven sigils in many Islamic occult manuals of *rūḥānī* white magic (i.e. the literature of the ‘ulūm gharība / ‘ulūm khafīya) that discuss it at length, especially in al-Būnī, because the following seven Arabic letters are indicated as representing it: ف ط ش ز خ ج ث (being that they are those seven letters that do not appear in *al-fātiḥa*, the first chapter of the Qur’ān).^

9 ^The Bábí reckoning of the commencement of the Islamic era begins as of the “call” of Muḥammad (*bith‘at*), that is, from his first encounter with the Archangel Gabriel on Mount Ḥirā and the Revelation of the first *surāh* of the Qur’ān (*al-‘alaq*, “the Clot”, i.e. the 96th chapter), and not from the commencement of the *hijrī* calendar, which is ten years subsequent to that event.^

10 ^The Bayān, in turn, is to be abrogated (or fulfilled) after this period in the Bábí messianic figure *He whom God shall make Manifest* (*man yuzbiruhu'Llāh*) in a cycle of progressively endless theophanological manifestations that, per the Báb’s novel gloss on the concept of the “resurrection” (*qiyāma*), will never actually cease, i.e. endless *qiyāmāt*. However, despite the claim of the Bahā’ís put forward on behalf of their founder *Bahā’ullāh*, in the doctrine of the Báb himself the interregnum period between these “manifestations” (*zuhūrāt*) – glossed as *dawr al-layl* (the cycle of night) – is to last for this approximately lengthy period of between 1511 to 2001 years, and the texts are quite explicit on this point. For example, in Unity 2, Gate 17 of the *Persian Bayān*, the Báb states, “If He whom God shall make Manifest appears in the number *ghiyāth* [= 1511] and all enter therein, none shall remain in the fire [of rejection]. If it tarries till [the number] *muṣṭaghāth* [= 2001], all shall enter therein, and none shall remain in the fire [of rejection], as all shall be transfigured into his Light...,” (my trans.); and Unity 3, Gate 15, “None knoweth the time of the manifestation other than God. Whosoever it shall take place, all must testify to its truth and give thanks unto God, although by His gracious bounty it is hoped that He will appear till the time of *muṣṭaghāth* [=2001] wherein the word of God may be elevated. And the Proof is the sign, for His very being proves Him, whilst He cannot be known by what is beneath His rank. Glory be to God above what is attributed to Him” (my trans.) Given this, the Bahā’í claim that the Báb had predicted the coming of the Bábí messianic figure in the person of their founder and in the year nine of the Bayānī cycle (corresponding to 1863 / 64 in the proper yearly reckoning beginning as of March 1850 or 1852 / 3 by the reckoning of the years of the manifestation from

Dramatically beginning his public career as messiah-prophet on May 23, 1844, with a commentary (*tafsīr*) on the twelfth *sūrāh* of the Qur'ān, known as the "best of stories" (*ahsan al-qissās*, i.e. Joseph); namely, the *Qayyūm al-Asmā'* (the "Peerless", "Arisen" or "Self-Subsistent Names"); he veritably produced a new Qur'ān in his own right consisting of precisely 111 *sūrāhs*, complete with disconnected letters opening many of the chapters and all the characteristic scriptural refrains, turns of phraseology, imperious tone, grammatical anomalies, sonorous elliptical ambiguities, textual and narratival parallelisms, and generally atypical linguistic stylisms typical of the high classical forms, diction and execution of the Arabic of the Perspicuous Book: claimed by the Book itself (and per the inimitability, *ij'āz al-qurān*, argument) that none can produce a single verse the like thereof. Not even the Ḥurūfī founder Faḍlullāh Aṣtarābādī's (d. 1394)<sup>11</sup> Persian *Jāvidān Nāmih-i-Kabīr* (The Great Book of Eternity) had dared reach such harrowingly dizzying heights of noble and sublime audacity; and this, from a mere twenty-four year old member of the merchant class with no seminary or advanced scholastic religious training whatsoever. Yet the lack of the author's formal education was precisely part of the appeal he was making regarding his innate, unlearned knowledge (*ilm fitrī*) and so evidence that such versical-signs (*āyāt*) were issuing from the same wellspring sources of inspiration (or *Revelation*) as the Qur'ān's.

As such what Hamid Dabashi says of the twelfth century Iranian Sufi iconoclast 'Ayn'ul-Quḍāt Hamadānī (d. 1131) is even more true of the Bāb, that he broke "...the interdictory motifs of his inherited sacred order to the subversive point of no return."<sup>12</sup> Here in this first of his works publicized was the most radical legacy, as well as the most far-reaching of tendencies, in Twelver Shi'ite esotericism and gnosis converged into a single *point* and in consummate (nay, dramatic) display; and so, therefore, epitomized and *personified*, in the Bāb himself.<sup>13</sup> Within days after composing the initial chapters of the *Qayyūm al-Asmā'* on the prompting of his eminent guest and visitor, the senior Shaykhī cleric Mullā Ḥusayn Bushrū'ī (d. 1849)<sup>14</sup>

1844) is not borne out by a single text, and especially not in the Arabic *Bayān* where they claim this occurs as per the cryptic phrase "*after a while*" (*ba'da hīn*) whose *abjad* numerical value is 144 reducing in its *jafr* to 9. That said, during the cycle of this interregnum between manifestations innumerable divine mirrors and guides are to arise guiding the faithful (or "initiates") between the two periods. To quote MacEoin, "...for our understanding of subsequent events...the hierarchical system of 'mirrors' (*mir'āt*), 'glasses' (*bulūriyyāt*), 'guides' (*adillā*), and 'witnesses' (*shuhadā*) developed by the Bāb in his later Writings [is of paramount importance]. This is not, in the strict sense, an organized system of hierarchical grades since the terms involved are, to a large degree, mutually interchangeable and imprecisely used in the texts. Nevertheless, hierarchy is certainly involved in the concept, and there are indications that definite roles were envisaged for individuals exercising the functions associated with the titles. In this respect, Bābī doctrine offers a clear continuation of the Shi'i theory of *Hujjiyya*, which is extended, not only to the prophet and the Imāms or their equivalents, but to other grades of a loose hierarchy as well," cf. *The Messiah of Shiraz* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2009), 346.^

11 ^See Shahrzad Bashir's *Fazlallah Astarabadi and the Hurufis* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2009).^

12 ^Cf. *Truth and Narrative: The Untimely Thoughts of 'Ayn'ul-Quḍāt Al-Hamadānī* (Richmond Surrey: Curzon Press, 1999), 5.^

13 ^For the massive controversy this work made on its diffusion by the Bābī emissary in Irāq and its reception by both religious circles and Ottoman secular authorities, see Moojan Momen's "The Trial of Mulla 'Ali Baṣṭāmī: A Combined Sunni-Shi'i Fatwa against the Bāb," in *Journal of the British Institute of Persian Studies*, 1982, 20: 113-43; RR, 220-38.^

14 ^See D. MacEoin's entry in *EIr* (cited in our previous piece).^

(i.e. his first believer, *awwal man āmana*, referred to thereafter as the “*Gate of the Gate*”, *Bāb al-Bāb*), sixteen other individuals in person as well soon paid their allegiances to the Bāb as his first believers (with one in absentia, totalling seventeen), thus constituting the Letters of the Living (*ḥurūf al-hayy*).<sup>15</sup> Per the neoplatonizing ranking system of Bābism, the Letters of the Living, together with the Bāb himself, made up the hierarchy of the First Unity (*al-wāḥid al-awwal*) of All-Things (*kullu-shay'*).<sup>16</sup>

After the formation of this initial hierarchy of the Bābī ecclesia, in early September 1844 the Bāb set out for the *hajj* pilgrimage to Mecca accompanied by the final member of it Mulla Muhammad ‘Alī Bāfurūshī *Quddūs* (d. 1849).<sup>17</sup> There he had made his claims public, writing assorted epistles to various religious leaders, including the *sharīf* of Mecca as well as other dignitaries. Returning to Iran in May/June 1845, and as the movement was expanding with exponential speed; not to mention as the impact of his initial claims were wreaking some havoc among Shī‘i faithful in Irāq and Iran; he was arrested by authorities in the port city of Bushihr and escorted by armed guard back to Shīraz where he was placed under house arrest and soon compelled to make a public retraction of his claims. During this period of his house arrest in Shīraz, throngs of visitors flocked to the city and written correspondences between the Bāb and various religious figures circulated back and forth from all over the Shī‘i centers.

A cholera epidemic in Fars province during the month of September 1846 compelled the Bāb to take flight from Shīraz to Isfahān where he found brief patronage under its ageing provincial governor Manuchihr Khān Mu‘tamid-Dawlih, the Georgian, and where initially he was, at first, even favourably received by a few notable religious dignitaries. There attempting to seek an audience with the Qājār monarch Muhammad Shāh (d. 1849) in the capital Tehrān; upon the death of Manuchihr Khān in February 1847, a *fatwa* calling for the Bāb’s death by the more conservative *‘ulamā* of the city opposed to his claims forced him to flee Isfahān heading for the capital under escort provided by its new provincial governor. On the outskirts of Tehrān he was intercepted on the orders of the prime minister Hājjī Mīrzā Aqāsī (d. 1849), who now became the Bāb’s chief Qājār enemy and symbolically emerged for the Bābīs what Mīranshāh (d. 1408) had been centuries earlier to Faḍl’ullāh Aṣtarābādī (d. 1394)

<sup>15</sup> ^This is because eighteen is the *abjad* numerical value of *hayy* (living, alive). They were likewise referred to as the *sābiqūn* (the preceders), which is a term taken directly from Twelver Shī‘i eschatological references.<sup>^</sup>

<sup>16</sup> ^The full pleroma of All-Things (*kullu-shay'*) consists of 361 in total (19 x 19). The number 19 itself is considered the most sacred number in Bābism; it is the fundamental unit elaborating the Persian Bayān as well as the Bayānī calendar of 19 months and 19 days. The words *wāḥid* (one, unity) and *wujūd* (being, existence) correspond to it in *abjad* numerology. Among the reasons why this number is held sacred is because the *bismillāh* benediction contains precisely nineteen letters in total and so the First Unity is held here to be the instantiated personifications of these letters who are then held to represent the concourse of the theophanic persons of the Fourteen Infallibles (i.e. Muhammad, Fāṭima and the Twelve Imāms) together with the four gates (or, *inter alia*, the four Archangels of the Throne: *Isfrā’īl* / Raphael, *Mīkā’īl* / Michael, *Izrā’īl* / Azrael and *Jibrā’īl* / Gabriel) and the Primal Will (*mashī’ā al-ūlā*) who has generated the preceding and who is represented by the letter *bā’* (ب) and its point (*nuqtā*); see Persian *Bayān*, Unity 1, and also Abbas Amanat *Resurrection and Renewal*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989; reprinted, Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 2005), 188-93; see as well Henry Corbin’s “*The Science of the Balance and Correspondences between Worlds in Islamic Gnosis according to the work of Haydar Amuli, 8th / 14th century*,” in *Temple and Contemplation* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986), 55-131.<sup>^</sup>

<sup>17</sup> ^See MacEoin’s entry in *EIr* (cited in our previous piece).<sup>^</sup>

and the Ḥurūfīs – *viz.* antichrist (*dajjāl*).

Fearing the Bāb’s influence on the impressionable monarch should he enter the capital and obtain an audience, Hajjī Mīrzā Aqāsī now redirected him under heavier escort to the northern town of Mākū on the Azerbaijān-Russian border where he was to remain from July 1847 to May 1848. Apprehensive of the Bāb’s growing influence and popularity, and what this meant for the Muslim subjects of the empire’s borders with Iran, the Russian minister in Tehrān next demanded the prime minister relocate the Bāb to the remote town of Chihrīq near Urūmīya where he was then placed under strict confinement. Soon after his arrival in Chihrīq he was briefly brought to Tabrīz where a kangaroo court, composed of the then crown prince Nāṣiruddīn Mīrzā and prominent ‘ulamā’, attempted not so much to ascertain the nature of his claims but to publicly humiliate him.<sup>18</sup> This farcical trial of the Bāb was to end with the Bāb’s bastinado and a fictitious letter manufactured by one of its chief presiders claiming the Bāb had retracted his claims.

With the Bābī uprisings in Māzandarān underway with violent ferocity as of the summer of 1848; this, following the Badasht gathering where the top Bābī leadership had formally announced the *qiyāma* and the end of the Islamic *sharī‘a* and its dispensation; the death of Muḥammad Shāh and the accession of Nāṣiruddīn Shāh to the Qājār throne in September 1848 convinced authorities that the Bāb had to be put to death. Arguably the initial tide of these uprisings prevented them from doing so earlier; but after the Māzandarān Bābī uprising at Shaykh Tabarsī was brutally crushed, with all of its leaders and most of its participants massacred; and with other uprisings now emerging in its stead with greater ferocity and spreading to Yazd then Nayrīz in central Iran then shortly after that to Zanjān in Azerbaijan as well; authorities acted swiftly and so in the early summer of 1850 the Bāb was summarily brought from Chihrīq back to Tabrīz where, together with a disciple, he was publicly executed by firing squad at noon on July 8<sup>th</sup> 1850 in the city’s military barracks. Having been formally appointed to succeed him some months before, the nineteen year old Mīrzā Yaḥyā Nūrī Ṣubḥ-i-Azal now emerged as the Bāb’s legatee, Mirror and successor and so the supreme pontiff of the nascent Bābī ecclesia.<sup>19</sup>

We should note here that the year 1844 (corresponding to the *hijrī* 1260) was precisely one-thousand years from the commencement of the Occultation (*ghayba*) of the Twelfth, and final, *ithnā ‘asharī* Imām Muḥammad ibn Ḥassan al-‘Askarī (b. 869 CE) in 260 AH (874 CE). The general significance of this fact alone should not be lost sight of in any overall assessment regarding the initial political successes of Bābīsm, as it underscores the fact that messianic fervour, speculation, not to mention expectation, was rife at the time throughout the area.<sup>20</sup> It may also to some extent possibly explain its ultimate political failure as well. Be that as it may, and as MacEoin has quite rightly pointed out,<sup>21</sup> the sheer prodigious output of compositions

<sup>18</sup> See MacEoin’s “The Trial of the Bāb: Shi‘ite Orthodoxy confronts its mirror image” in *The Messiah of Shirāz*, 409-50.^

<sup>19</sup> See our previous article. Here we would like to make a correction to one of the citations in the notes of our previous piece. In n24 we said that S.M. Nabavi-Razavi Rohani’s *Tārīkh-i-Firqi-i-Bābī’i dar Baghdād az 1268 tā 1280* (Unpublished dissertation: Tehrān, 2013) was an MA thesis from Tehrān University. It is in fact from Shahīd Bihishtī University and not Tehrān University.^

<sup>20</sup> The whole first part of Amanat’s *Resurrection and Renewal*, pp. 33-105, serves as an instructive primer in that regard.^

<sup>21</sup> In *Sources for Early Babi Doctrine and History: A Survey* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1992), henceforth *Sources*.^

left by the Bāb during this short six year period of his ministry - totalling some “fifty volumes, each of one hundred pages with ten words to the line and twenty lines to the page” by one estimate (*Sources*, 15) - perhaps constitutes one of the most interesting corpus of writings available in the history of chiliastic sectarian movements in Islamicate; or elsewhere, for that matter.

## The Polar Motif, the Science of the Letters and the Alchemical Ascension

We will now turn to a discussion of the polar motif animating the inner intention behind our main piece by the Bāb (translated below) and how this informs the overall *situation* of its alchemical narrative, before reiterating a few points on the science of the letters, after which we will touch upon the symbolism of the alchemical ascension in our piece. We will state from the beginning of this next discussion that what is detailed below is reflective of the greater doctrinal framework that has been classified as High Imamology.<sup>22</sup> This High Imamology, for its part, can arguably be located within sources and transmissions much older – and closer to the period of Islam’s first centuries – than similar schemes found much later on, such as the theosophical Sufism of figures like Ibn ‘Arabī (d. 1240) and his school. That said, the specific points of departure, not to mention the qualified hue, this perspective takes here is from start to finish ones that singularly inform Bābism and the earlier Shaykhī school.<sup>23</sup>

From the very outset of the greater Shī‘ite tradition, the first Imām ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib’s (d. 661) well known maxim that “alchemy is the sister of prophecy” was to be taken quite acutely by all of our Shi’ite *spirituals* as one of several pivoting and guiding leitmotifs of Shī‘ite gnosis and esotericism *tout court*. Besides this famous statement, there are countless others like it, such as the Imām’s homily of the transmuted fire (*al-nār al-muharraq*) that is found in the *Khuṭba al-Bayān* (Sermon of the Exposition),<sup>24</sup> one of the two most widely regarded enigmatic sermons attributed to the Commander of the Faithful, wherein *theopathic* statements abound<sup>25</sup> – many of them being of a distinctly alchemical flavour. This homily, in turn, was to famously become a topic of commentary by the fourteenth century Shī‘ite alchemist al-Jaldakī,<sup>26</sup> to name but only one of its many eminent commentators. Indeed from the very beginning of this specific tradition’s general treatment of the *arcana*, the polar-axial position of the Imāms – nay, the People of the House (*ahl al-bayt*) in entirety - suffuses it wherein to

<sup>22</sup> ^The best introduction on the subject remains Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi’s *The Divine Guide in Early Shi‘ism: The Sources of Esoterism in Islam*; see as well Todd Lawson’s “*The Dawning Places of the Lights of Certainty in the Divine Secrets Connected with the Commander of the Faithful by Rajab Bursi*,” in *The Legacy of Medieval Persian Sufism* ed. Leonard Lewisohn (London: Khaniqah-i-Nimatullahi Publications, 1992; re-printed Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1999), 261-276.^

<sup>23</sup> ^For the Shaykhī school, see Henry Corbin’s *History of Islamic Philosophy* (London and New York: Kegan Paul International and the Institute of Ismā‘īlī Studies, 1993), 352-6, and *En islam iranien Aspects spirituels et philosophiques: Tome IV L’École d’Ispahan, L’École shaykhie, Le Douzième Imām* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), 205-300; and below.^

<sup>24</sup> ^See Muḥammad ibn Maḥmūd Dihdār Shīrāzī’s *Sharḥ-i-Khuṭba al-Bayān*, n.d., n.p.; see also Corbin’s apropos remarks regarding al-Jaldakī, the *Sermon of the Exposition* and the equivalency of alchemy with *ḥikma* (theosophical wisdom) in *History of Islamic Philosophy*, 331-2.^

<sup>25</sup> ^The other being the *Sermon Between the Two Gulfs* (*khuṭba al-ṭatanjīyya*).^

<sup>26</sup> ^See Henry Corbin *Alchimie comme art hiératique*, ed. Pierre Lory (Paris: L’Herne, 1986), 31; 46-47.^

a great extent the motifs of search and recognition of the Imām and the *opus* and creation of the Most Great Elixir (*iksīr al-aṣam*) – otherwise known as the Stone (*al-ḥajar*) - may be said on many levels to be synchronous discourses; that is, narratives necessarily interpenetrating each other.

From this vantage point of High Imamology, therefore, the stress laid in the esoteric teachings of the Imāms on the realization of the “*true religion*” (*dīn al-ḥaqqa* = *ma’arifa*, gnosis); which they denote likewise with the term the “*pure religion*” (*dīn al-khāliṣ*); with the *noesis* of the Hiero-Intelligence (*‘aql*);<sup>27</sup> being the actual realization<sup>28</sup> (*tahqīq*, *tahaquqq*) of the initiatic knowledge (the transmitted *‘ilm* of the Imām) as such, and hence the realization of what in the Alamūtī Niẓārī Ismā‘īlī doctrine superbly gets termed the *Imām-of-ones-being*;<sup>29</sup> constitutes the overall significance of the *ars operativa* in Shī‘ite alchemy. In this perspective, the *Person* of the Imām; that is, the *Celestial Personality* who stands as the Veil of Light, who is both the master presiding over paradise as well as hell,<sup>30</sup> and who is the Speaking Book (*kitāb al-nātiq*); and the Philosopher’s Stone are one and the same because as the Theophany *par excellence* the Imām stands at the limit (the *hadd*) at which the *coincidentia oppositorum* occurs.<sup>31</sup> This may be one way a Shī‘ite alchemical gloss, a *tawīl*, on Qur’ān 41:53 may be understood.<sup>32</sup> But, even more explicitly, it is how the enigmatic statement by the Commander of the Faithful properly commencing the discourse of the Sermon Between the Two Gulfs (*khutba al-tatārijīya*) must, in our opinion, be understood: “*I am the One Standing between the Two Gulfs [and] I am the One observant over the two Wests and the two Easts...*”<sup>33</sup> Given this, the Imām is here the *opus* as well as its elixir / *lapis*, its patient and its actor, the *alpha* and the *omega*, wherefore Ja‘far proclaims, “*verily Our Cause is the Real Truth and the Reality of the Truth, and it is the Manifest and the Hidden, and the Hidden of the Hidden, and it is a Mystery and the Enigma of that Mystery, and it is a secreted Secret, and a [high] Mystery concealed within*

<sup>27</sup> See n3 above.^

<sup>28</sup> ‘In itself considered a divine bounty (*ni‘ma*) rather than acquired through personal effort or acquisition (*kasb*).^

<sup>29</sup> We note the following *khabar* from Ja‘far recorded in Kulaynī’s *al-Kāfi*: “God has placed two kinds of authority over humans. The apparent and manifest (*zāhir*) authority and the internal and hidden (*bātin*) authority. The prophets and messengers are the apparent and manifest authorities, and Hiero-Intelligence [*‘aql* = nous] is the hidden (*bātin*) and internal authority,” H 12, Ch. 1.^

<sup>30</sup> ‘One famous *hadīth* in Majlisī’s *Bihār al-Anwār* (The Oceans of the Lights) is noted for characterizing ‘Alī by the appellation صاحب الجنة و النار (the master of paradise and the fire), see <http://shiabook.blogfa.com/post-9.aspx> (accessed 24 April 2011).^

<sup>31</sup> Corbin: *l’Imam comme mazhar est bien la limite à partir de laquelle prennent naissance les couples de termes antithétiques* (There is no doubt, the Imam as divine manifestation, is the limit at which the various pairs of antithetical terms are born, trans. Todd Lawson ), cf. *Coincidentia Opppositorum in the Qayyūm al-Asmā: the terms “Point” (nuqta), “Pole” (qutb), “Center” (markaz) and the Khutba al-Tatārijīya* Occasional Papers in Shaykhi, Babi and Bahā’ī Studies, H-Bahā’ī: Vol.5, No.1, January, 2001.^

<sup>32</sup> ‘Soon shall we show them Our signs in the horizons (*fil-āfāq*) and in themselves (*wa fi anfusihim*) until it become manifest (*yatabayyana*) to them that, verily, it is the *Real Truth* (*al-ḥaqqa*), my trans.^

<sup>33</sup> ‘My trans. Note the concept of the *Watcher(s)* (*irin*) in the Book of Daniel as a cipher indicating God’s angels as “watchful” or “vigilant sentinels,” <http://www.abu.nb.ca/Courses/NewTestament/Hebrews/Angels.htm> (retrieved 24 April 2011); for an Arabic text of the Sermon Between the Two Gulfs, see Appendix II of Lawson’s paper above.^

another Secret...”<sup>34</sup>

As such the discourse by the Bāb below can on many parallel levels be glossed as an invitation to its recipient coded in alchemical cipher to believe in his cause (*amr*) as the True Imām and Divine Guide *qua* the Philosopher’s Stone / the Most Great Elixir: an invitation wherein the inner symbolic reality and station of the Bāb himself is unveiled through such ciphers to his interlocutor within a discourse about the *ars operativa*. This is, however, not to be taken in either any categorical sense or as a mere metaphoric discourse couched in the language of alchemical flourishes. Instead the discourse is to be taken on ascending scales and upon an anagogical ladder of ever expanding meanings engaging symbolic allegory *qua* the *ars operativa* that cannot be communicated in any other way. Given this, we would suggest that the stages (or theophanic sequences, rather) of ‘Alī’s *hadīth al-haqīqa* be kept firmly in mind here as communicative of the unfolding trajectories of the anagogical levels of ascent acutely present in our text. Here it is, as it were, the Bāb’s “*disclosure of the majesties of glorification (subūhāt al-jalāl)* without indication”<sup>35</sup> to his addressee through which the stages of the process<sup>36</sup> will ultimately culminate for this interlocutor, should he assent, in the extinguishing of the lamp of his own partial intellect upon the apprehension of the arisen Dawn of the Universal Intellect, the Primal Point, which here is the Bāb himself as the Manifest Imām: the Manifest Imām who is the Theophany *par excellence* and so the epiphany of the *coincidentia oppositorum* made manifest to our interlocutor.<sup>37</sup> This becomes, then, the veritable creation of the elixir / *lapis* “*in the horizons and in the selves*” as the realization of the “*Real Truth / the Truly Real*” (*al-haqq*), i.e. the *Zuhūr* (divine manifestation / appearance). In other words, for the initiated progeny of Adam and Eve, it is through, by and in the Imām wherein the *palingenesis* occurs, since the Imām is the soul’s perfect mirror (*mir’at*) - literally its *locus amoenus*, its place of repose<sup>38</sup> - who functions as its veritable symbolic *athanor* that *accomplishes* its transmutation.

Let us analyse the matter further and from within our own text.<sup>39</sup> The Bāb begins the second paragraph of the discourse by stating that “God has not created anything without also fashioning within it a letter (*harf*) of the elixir in accordance with its station / existential rank” (*maqām*) (14-15). Here this disclosure is cipherically iterative of the metaphysical actuality of the Pre-Eternal Covenant of *Alast* (Qur’ān, 7:172, *al-A’rāf*, “the Heights”)<sup>40</sup> whereby *in illo tempore* the pre-creational latency of the collective multitude of the *eidaic* (Platonic Ideal-

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Ṣaffār al-Qummī, *Basā’ir al-Darajāt* (Beirut: n.d.), 12:59.^

<sup>35</sup> I.e. the first theophanic sequence of the *hadīth al-haqīqa*.^

<sup>36</sup> See our n25 in the previous article.^

<sup>37</sup> For a general discussion of this point in its early Bābī trajectory, see Todd Lawson, “*The Structure of Existence in the Bāb’s Tafsīr and the Perfect Man Motif*,” *Studia Iranica*, 1992: 81-99.^

<sup>38</sup> Note the symbolism of the Tree (*shajara*) – particularly the Tree of Reality (*shajarat’ul-haqīqa*) - as one indicative of the *embodified* (not “embodied”) Theophany *qua* the Eternal Imām in the writings of the Bāb. In the context of Islamic-Bābī esoterism and gnosis, *embodiment* = *hulūl* (incarnation) whereas *embodification* = *tajallī* / *zuhūr* (theophany / manifestation).^

<sup>39</sup> The next two paragraphs is our own summarized paraphrase of key sections of the Bāb’s commentary on the *sūrah* of the Cow (al-Baqara), his first extensive work prior to his declaration in 1844, which we hold as the edifice of his entire metaphysical system. For the text of this commentary, see, <http://www.h-net.org/~bahai/reprint/bab/S-Z/tafbaq/baqarah.htm> (accessed 21 March 2011).

<sup>40</sup> It should be noted that among the titles for the Imāms is the *men of the Heights (rijāl al-a’rāf)* whereby this whole *surāh*, and this verse specifically and the subsequent, is said to refer to them. In his commen-

Archetype) form-substances (*jawharīyāt*) - which is another way of saying the *existential particles* (*dharriyāt*) - of the progeny of Adam and Eve are *dramaturgically* assembled upon the *atemporal* planes of gathering (*mashhar*) – that is, in the *zamān* (time) of *dahr* (durationlessness perpetuity) - to bear witness within themselves *en toto* and in the presence of the Divine as to the distinctiveness, the singular uniqueness (*fardāniya*), of their Lord (i.e. “Am I not your Lord?,” *alāstu bi-rabbikum*, to which the collective response is, “yes, we testify [that Thou art!],” *bala shahadnā*); this, so that upon the Day of Resurrection (*yawm al-qiyāma*) – which in its Bābī parlance explicitly denotes the *Zuhūr* itself – they may not then claim to have been unaware or heedless of their own existentially *situated* pre-creational (*fītri*) affirmation (*ibid.* our paraphrase). In its Shī‘ite-Bābī gloss the Lord (*rabb*), of course, here stands for the Imām and not for the *Godhead per se*, since in Its utter, remote transcendence (*tanzih*) It stands well beyond all things and so can dispense with such trifles as requiring either the assent or the denial of Its creation. Therefore, to put it another way, the Imām is what is here meant in Qur’ān 53:13 as the *sidrat’ul-muntahā* (the Lote-Tree of the farthest limit, that properly marks the boundary of the seventh heaven), and so here the *ars operativa* and soteriology are intrinsically linked schemes thus making of the Shī‘ite-Bābī *opus* a generally salvific undertaking.

Now the existential mark of this primordial assent to the Lordship (*rubūbiya*) of the Imām is the letter (the *harf*) by which each individual member of the progeny of Adam and Eve - past, present and future - is creatively instantiated because it is each one’s primeval, pre-creational *individuation* (the predetermined *fīriya* of each thing, its *taqdīr*) in the Pre-Eternal (*azalī*) divine matrix. The inner mystery (*sirr*) of each letter, in turn, is its *elixiric* reality (*haqīqa iksīriya*) – but contingent upon its actualization in the horizontally situated spatiotemporal mundane - to which its realization is ultimately linked and dependent *via* its affirmation (*ithbāt*) of the Celestial Person of the Imām (= the meaning of the *illā allāh / except God of the shahada*) that, then, is the key (*miftāh*) – its own *individuated* cipher, as it were - to its felicity (*falah*), its palingenesis, in the apprehension of the Imām-of-ones-being;<sup>41</sup> which is, the realization of the Hiero-Intelligence (*viz.* the *‘aql* as the actualization of the Imām’s *ilm*). In Suhrawardī’s diction, this is the realization of one’s Perfect Nature (*tiba’ al-tamm*), the *syzygy* (i.e. the Zoroastrian *yazata*), namely, the *malakūtī* angelic-double; thereby making of the Eternal Imām here the Celestial Lord of the species (*rabb al-naw’*) presiding over the progeny of Adam and Eve. This, then, is one of the meanings behind ‘Alī’s reiteration of the Delphic maxim, “*whosoever knows their Self, knows their Lord*”<sup>42</sup> given that the Self (*nafs, anima*) here *qua* the Imām-of-ones-being is in all cases the Eternal Imām, the *‘aql* (Hiero-Intelligence).<sup>43</sup> As such to those amongst their initiated gnostic adepts (i.e. the *mu’mīnīn*, the

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tary on the calligram of the Greatest Name, Siyyid Kāzim Rashtī (d. 1843 / 4?) applies this title to the Imāms whilst corresponding each of the sigils of the Greatest Name to them as well. For a text of Siyyid Kāzim Rashtī’s commentary, see <http://www.scribd.com/doc/52295314/Rashti-Sharh-Ism-Allah-al-A-zam> (accessed 4 April 2011) (we are grateful to Professor Lawson for making the MS. of this important work available to us).^

<sup>41</sup> “The Imām who is the anima, soul or Self (*nafs*) of one’s being in the reality of divine affirmation but not in the negation (*lā ilāha*) that is the egoic, concupiscent self or the mere egoic self-individuation (which is still not the spiritual individuation of the Self).^

<sup>42</sup> “The Bāb’s own commentary on this famous *ḥadīth* instances this point explicitly.”

<sup>43</sup> Guénon: “...insofar as it is a ‘second birth’, initiation is fundamentally nothing other than the ‘actualization’

true, initiatic believers) who have truly known - that is, *noeticized* - their Lord, the Eternal Imām is both the apotheosis of their souls within the transmuting process of their individual *palingeneses* (their arisen Dawn<sup>44</sup>) (*sol*) as well as the unique (*fardī*), individuated *sophianity*, the *fāṭimiyā*, that now celestially descends upon them as a result<sup>45</sup> and so attaches itself henceforth as the permanent mark (*luna*), its vestigial signature or sign ('*alāma*); because this is the elixic reality now actualized, which is the '*‘ayn al-fu’ād* (the Eye or Intelligence of the Heart) *actuated* (on *fu’ād*, see our note below).<sup>46</sup>

Having unpacked above what the inner thrust of the explicitly alchemical section of our treatise is meant to convey, let us now make a few more pertinent comments about the science of the letters (*‘ilm al-ḥurūf*) itself and its relation to the Art. In his *Muqadimma* the fourteenth century Muslim sociologist and historiographer Ibn Khaldūn says of it:

Let it be known to you...that the science of letters is an important science. The scholar who knows it comes to know things that he would not be able to know with the help of any other science in the world. The practice of the science of (letter magic) requires certain conditions. With its help, the scholar may discover the secrets of creation and the inner workings of nature. Thus, he learns the two results of philosophy, which are letter magic and its sister (alchemy). The veil of the unknown is lifted for him. He thus learns the secret recesses of the heart...<sup>47</sup>

More recently than Ibn Khaldūn, in *The Science of the Letters*<sup>48</sup> René Guénon poignantly makes the connection between the Red Sulphur (*al-kibrīt al-ahmar*), the science of the letters and its assimilation to the *ars operativa* generally speaking. He concludes his essay by observing:

In fact, these two sciences [i.e. the science of letters and alchemy], when understood in depth, are in reality one and the same; and that which both of them express under very different appearances is nothing more than the very process of initiation itself which, moreover, rigorously reproduces the cosmogonic process, inasmuch as the total realisation of the possibilities of a being is necessarily brought about by passing through the same phases as that of universal Existence (*ibid.*)

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in the human being of the very principle which, in universal manifestation, appears as the *eternal Avatara...*"

*Perspectives on Initiation* (Hillsdale: Sophia Perennis, 2001), 299.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>44</sup> ^Per the meaning of the final theophanic sequence of the *ḥadīth al-haqīqa*.^

<sup>45</sup> Note the concept of the Mazdean *farr* / Xvarnah (the light of glory), esp. as outlined by Henry Corbin in *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth: From Mazdaean Iran to Shi’ite Iran*, trans. Nancy Pearson, (Princeton: Bollingen Series XCI, Princeton University Press, 1977), 3-50.

<sup>46</sup> ^Apart from what is stated below, we should point out that everything that accrues in the definition of '*‘ayn al-qalb* (eye of the heart) in Sufi glossaries is applicable to *fu’ād* and more so in its Shaykhī-Bābī denotation. This is especially emphasized given that its employment in Qur’ān 53:11 specifically follows, and is juxtaposed, by “vision”, namely, the Prophet’s own. Given this, we will say that *fu’ād*, the Intelligence of the Heart, the Hiero-Intelligence and the Imām-of-one’s-being are synonymous and thoroughly interchangeable terms.^

<sup>47</sup> ^Trans. Franz Rosenthal, chp.6: Pdf version (n.p., n.d.), 681.^

<sup>48</sup> ^In *Fundamental Symbols: The Universal Language of Sacred Science* ed. & comp. Michel Valsan, trans. Alvin Moore Jnr., revi. Martin Lings (Oxford: Quinta Essentia, 1995), 34-38.^

Here Guénon has highlighted the essential facility of this science's application in the practice of the *arcana*, especially when implying how it mirrors (even “facilitates”) the steps on the ladder of the soul's ascent through the levels of Being. The Bāb restates the issue even more explicitly, and on a practical level even enjoins the practice of the science of letters upon all his believers as a cornerstone of the Bayānī creed,<sup>49</sup> making it one of the exoteric pillars of the new Bayānī *shari'a* – or more precisely, *ahkām* (ordinances). In the section known as “*the tablet regarding the letters*” (*lawh-i-hurūf*) of the late *Book of the Five Grades*, in much more augmented fashion, the Bāb echoes the last part of Guénon's point, as well as delineating the greater Bayānī metaphysical perspective on it, stating:

...Among the bounties that the Presence of Unchangableness (*hadrat-i-lam yazal*) [i.e. God] has bestowed upon the Point of the Bayān is the knowledge of all things in a single Self (*nafs-i-wāhid*) so that he may behold generated existence (*takwīn*) within the world of the letters (*ālam-i-hurūf*) with the eye of certainty (*'ayn-i-yaqīn*); and this is a perfect proof unto all just like the versical-signs (*āyāt*); and it was [concealed] among the hidden treasures (*makhzūn*) of the Divine knowledge (*'ilm-i-ilāhi*) that was not revealed until now, for it is more tremendous (*a'zz*) than any other knowledge. All the [holy] Books will be revealed [in the future], and it is from this knowledge that the Cause of “*your God, who is One God*,” (*Qur'ān* 16:22) has [already] been revealed [in the past]. In the Bayān the manifestations of each lordship [subsist] under the shadow of this verse within the gates of paradise and likewise in this manner within the fire, which “*over it is nineteen*” (*Qur'ān* 74:30). And the Bayān has arisen within the words of exaltedness (*kalimāt-i-izzīya*) to such an extent that, God willing, within [the cycle of the] Bayān [itself] it [i.e. the science of the letters] shall reach its mode of completion and utmost perfection. In short, all things (*kullu-shay'*) never fall outside [the purview] of the twenty-eight letters [of the Arabic alphabet], and in this manner the generated existence of all things is [likewise] never outside [of the purview] of the meaning of these letters; and the Truly Real (*haqq*), glorified be He and High, has assembled these letters within eleven degrees of Its knowledge;<sup>50</sup> and from the Talismanic-Temple (*haykal*) of the Primal Will (*mashīyat-i-avvaliya*),

49 ^“*But Strive in the Knowledge of the Letters, and Conjunctions of the Numbers of God's Names, and Conjunctions of like words, and Conjunctions of like Writings in their proper place; for Permission hath been accorded for each person to arrange the order of the Bayān in such wise as appeareth sweetest; for though it appear after a thousand fashions, yet do all return to the Soul of the Bayān,*” Unity 3, Gate 16, trans. E.G. Browne in *Summary of the Persian Bayan in Selections from the Writings of E.G. Browne on the Babi and Baha'i Religions*, ed. Moojan Momen (Oxford: George Ronald, 1987), 316.^

50 ^As MacEoin has correctly glossed, these are the eleven degrees corresponding to the sum of the letters □ and □ that instances *hūwīya*. Where he has erred, is in glossing *hūwīya* as “existence” (*wujūd*) without further commentary since *hūwīya* represents the mystery of the divine *ipseity* that is *śrīcū sensu* necessarily beyond *wujūd* in Bābī metaphysics, which properly belongs to the realm of the Primal Will. What the Bāb has indicated here, which is immediately made apparent in the following clause, is that these eleven degrees representing the *ipseity* are the mirrors to the Primal Will who represents the *ipseity*. In other words, the Primal Will, as the emanated instantiation of the *ipseity*, mirror's it – not that it *is* it. The larger emanationist scheme here is apparent. MacEoin's error is both semantic and inattention to the subtleties and categories informing the larger metaphysics here.^

which is the First Human (*insān-i-awwal*), [It] has determined the outward [form] of this Talismanic-Temple to be [the letter] *hā'* (ه) and its interior to be [the letter] *wāw* (و); and it has fashioned eighteen Talismanic-Temples under the shadow of this Talismanic-Temple within the ocean of [divine] names; and it cannot become twenty because the utmost limit of the [divine] names is the [divine] name the Aid Invoked (*mustaghāth* = 2001); and consider that in the [eighteen] Talismanic-Temples this matter shall be conclusively proven within the most perfect framework. And the diffusion of the revelation of this knowledge of the Talismanic-Temples is naught but for the sake of [establishing] conclusive demonstrations for the Guides of the Bayān for [the sake of all who are] other than them [i.e. the non-believers, i.e. 'awwām,<sup>51</sup> the generality] (446-7, my trans.)<sup>52</sup>...

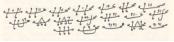
Earlier in the same the book, directly speaking to alchemy, the Bāb states:

...The science of the Elixir is like the creation of all things [i.e. the cosmogenesis]. It is not possible for it to have a beginning or an end, and no one may grasp the grades and stations of its limits other than God, for all have arisen by the cause / command (*amr*) of God! Verily within the [the acme of] the interior reality of this [alchemical] science is [found] God [who is concealed] within the [infinite] veils of holiness (*hu-jub al-quds*). And whosoever anyone from amongst His servants hath come upon this [alchemical science], it hath been by the command / cause of God that they engage in it [i.e. the *ars operativa*] (*hum bi-amri'Llāhi ya'malūn*) (336, my trans.)

Now in our piece below the Bāb begins his short discourse by offering a set of instructions to his interlocutor that then properly sets the stage for the *ars operativa* of the *opus* itself. While some may perceive the details of these two paragraphs as addressing two completely separate questions, in reality they are not. All aspects of the discussion, from beginning to end, are interlinked within a larger nexus of correspondences because each phase builds upon the next within the stages of the initiatic journey, all the way to the final palingenesis. He says, “take at the head of every ten the first letter and calculate it by the first element of Fire around the name of God ‘the Constrictor’; and in the second element of Air around the name of God ‘the Living’; and in the third element of Water around the name of God ‘the Revivifier’; and in the fourth element of Earth around the name of God the ‘Taker of Life’ ...” (1-4). These four divine names and their specific correspondences to the four elements as detailed by the Bāb (i.e. Fire, Air, Water and Earth); the sevenfold division and placement of the twenty-eight letters according to the corresponding element; the calculation that follows and the meditation that ensues as a result; determines the operative balances (*mawazīn*) that then resolves the precise astrological equilibriums and cosmic sympathies that then allows the interlocutor *qua* aspirant his encounter with the Great Sovereign Angel (*malak al-kabir*) who will reveal to him the correct keys to his alchemical ascension – viz. the *talismanic-lunettes* or magical ciphers, the occult pens (*aqlām*).<sup>53</sup> This in turn will then guide his soul past the sublunar realm, the flight beyond the cosmic crypt, and over to the Orient of Light (*mashriq*

<sup>51</sup> ^Whom in the language of Imāmī esotericism represent the non-initiates.^

<sup>52</sup> ^This is our own translation that MacEoin partially provides in his “Nineteen Century Babi Talismans,” *Studia Islamica*, 14 / i, (1985): 83; now in *The Messiah of Shiraz*, 543-4.^

<sup>53</sup> That is,  Cf. *Ritual's in Babism and Bahaism* (London and New York: I.B Tauris Pub-

*al-nūr*), from the *locus* of which he will next journey to the Divine Throne (*'arsh*) where he will be (re-)united with the Eternal Imām within the apperception of those visionary topographies of the *mundus imaginalis* (*'ālam al-mithāl*) laid out in the second paragraph.

Here, with the divine assistance issuing from the Eternal Imām, he will go beyond the Throne itself and thereby become annihilated within the reality of the Greatest Name (*ism al-a'zam*) that will constrict his being (*qabd*) within Itself through the burning Celestial Fire which will then open him up, and so unite him further, with the waystations (*manāzil*) of the greater multiversal expanses of Being – i.e. the Primal Will. In this *situs* he will behold the theophany of the existential *Sinā'i* reflected to him from the *ipseital* stations of the Exclusive Oneness (*aḥadīya*) wherein the *retorta* of his *sol* (*animus*) is joined with – that is, falls into place upon the rim of - the alembic of his *luna* (*anima*). The fruit of the Siniatic Tree that will emerge from this initial *conjunction* within himself – the fruit of which he will now eat – will reveal to him in that limit the bifurcated animation of the mystery of the Divine Power (*active*, i.e. male = *sol* = sulfur) within that of the Divine Predomination (*passive*, i.e. female = *luna* = salt).

As the realization of this mystery is made to fall into its *situs*; that is, become fully manifested *into* him; the Most Great Crimson Oil emerges from the Celestial Siniatic Fire; which is the appearance (*bayān*) of the Eternal Imām's proximate imminence within the horizons of his self as the Speaker (*nātiq*) within him; at which point our aspirant becomes the very sign of God “*throughout all the worlds according to its [or ‘his’] capacity*” (21); namely, he has thoroughly awoken to the realization of the Imām-of-his-being, the Hiero-Intelligence (*'aql*), his own divine mystery, that then encompasses seven earths and seven heavens within him; meaning, he is now the transfigured Theophanic Light (*nūr mutajallī*) of the Eternal Imām within the *loci* of his own seven metaphysical subtleties (*mashā'ir*)<sup>54</sup> because the Eternal Imām is one in him now since he has no further identity any more other than the Eternal Imām's; as he has swum across the ocean of the corrosive waters, stripping all vestiges of his partial ego in the process, and over to its other shores thereby extinguishing the lamp (*sirāj*) of his *separative* (*solve*) identity, which has swiftly passed away in its illusory substrates, for the emergence of that which is faster than the twinkling of an eye, *viz.* the *already-always* arisen Dawn of the Imām-of-his-being (*coagula*). So when the Bāb later states, “*Wherfore have we concealed from revealing this secret from the gaze of all those looking upon the penetrative metaphysical subtlety of divergent contrariness*” (23), he is implicitly indicating this theosophic isomorphism – i.e. the trajectoral depth that is the epiphanic setting placement (*mawqi'*) - which informs, then, the culmination of this palingenetic process, *viz.* the *ta'aluh* (i.e. theosis), that none but the realized adepts, the theosophic sages (i.e. *mu'minīn* = *ḥakīm muti'ālib*), can fully comprehend, let alone communicate, wherfore the gazes of the generality are concealed from beholding it.

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lishers and the Centre of Middle Eastern Studies, University of Cambridge, 1994), Appendix III, 101. In this form above – the independent forms proceeding horizontally from top far-right to bottom far-left - they are held by the Bāb to be the telesmatic instantiations of each of the nineteen letters of the *bismillāh*.

<sup>54</sup> Otherwise known as the *latā'if*.<sup>54</sup>

## The MSS., Locating the Piece and Semi-Critical Translation

The first of the two MSS. of our treatise below was obtained from amongst scans kindly given to us by the webmaster of Bayanic.com in 2007. The collection the present work came from was simply listed as *Book 38* and contained forty-four short, independent treatises and responses to queries by the Bāb. The paper of the MS. appears to be in a light green with, in total, 319 folio pages (160 pages of actual scan) with between eighteen to nineteen lines per page. Our piece was the twenty-ninth in the collection and occurs in full on p. 91 of our scan (folio 181-82 of the MS.) The MS. contains no colophon or any other identifiers as to provenance or the identity of the scribe and its date of completion. We have designated this MS. as *Bay.B38*. We note that a bulk of the items contained in *Bay.B38* can also be found in other versions within the assorted INBA (Iranian National Bahā'ī Archives) collections.<sup>55</sup>

The second MS. was obtained for us in early April 2011 by the webmaster of the Digital Occult Manuscripts Library from material then recently made public by the Digital Library of Iran<sup>56</sup> and marked as MS. 12448. We have designated this collection as *DLI 12448*. Originally from the library of one Bāghir Taraqī (and catalogued as #38), *DLI 12448* seems to have made its way at some point from this collection into the collection of the Iranian National Majlis Library - and as the displaying stamp on the front-piece demonstrates - sometime during the Pahlavī era (1926-1979 CE) where it was catalogued as 85733 / 12191. What appears to be some kind of identifier for the scribe (but not a name) appears underneath the table of contents (*fibrīst*), but it is completely illegible to us in the scan and so we cannot properly make it out. This compilation contains fourteen works of the Bāb roughly covering the period up to the point in 1847 just before he made his claim to *Qā'imīya* and includes the very rare visitation prayer (*zīyāra*) for Fātīma that until now was thought to exist in only a single MS. (per *Sources*, 99).<sup>57</sup> The scribe does not further identify him or herself on any page of either its verso or recto, nor does he / she provide the date for their transcription; but they were certainly a Bābī of some description given the general employment of laudatory praises (i.e. *salawāt*, penned in red ink) at the very opening of a number of the items when referring to the Bāb as "His Holiness the Remembrance, upon him be peace" (*haḍrat al-dhikr 'aliyhi al-salām*). The Pdf of this MS. is 242 pages in length – and given this, it is difficult to ascertain where the actual folios of the content begin, so we will here cite the page numbers as per the Pdf (its front and back binding have also been included in the scan as part of a single file) - with its table of contents occurring as of p. 8 immediately followed on the next page by the Bāb's *Ṣabīfa A'māl al-Sana'* (The Epistle of the Undertakings during the Year) with the text of the whole MS. ending at p. 240. Fifteen lines per page, the benediction of our piece begins at the bottom of p. 233 with the piece itself covering all of pp. 234-235 and ending on the second line of p. 236. That said, the appearance of this MS. compilation (that in Western academic print, at least, was altogether unknown) is a very important find for Bābī studies, and together with some of the other MSS. we have generously been given by the Iranian Bayānī community over the past decade, challenges a few (if not more) of MacEoin's findings in *Sources* that now require some update and revision.

<sup>55</sup> Specifically volumes 40, 53 and 69. For these volumes, see, <http://www.h-net.org/~bahai/index/albab.htm> (accessed 18 April 2011).^

<sup>56</sup> The whole of this Pdf can be found on Scribd, at, <http://www.scribd.com/doc/52390907/Assorted-Early-Works-of-the-Bab> (accessed 10 April 2011).^

<sup>57</sup> Which we are presently in the process of preparing a translation from our MS.^

Only one other MS. of this specific piece is presently known to us, that being INBMC 67 (International Bahā'ī Manuscript Collections), 203-4 (see *Sources ibid.*) We have neither perused nor had access to this specific MS. Per this MS. Stephen Lambden provides a partial translation of the second half of the piece – *viz.* our second paragraph, with some variations and the apparent occurrence of an extra clause in his translated text that does not appear to occur in either one of ours.<sup>58</sup> We have followed Lambden's translation closely in this second paragraph and agree with some of his wording but not with many others. All of this has been indicated in the notes. We should mention that there is a much longer discourse by the Bāb on gematria and alchemy that expands upon some of the themes presented in our piece below. Based on the MSS. INBMC 91: 30-36 and INBMC 67: 228-233 - neither one which we have had access to - Lambden provides an incomplete English translation of it on his website.<sup>59</sup> There is also, of course, the discussions of gematria and alchemy in the *Persian Bayān* and the *Book of the Five Grades* (esp. 336-56) - snippets of which we have quoted above - that represents the Bāb's latest and most systematic thoughts on the subject.

The circumstances for the composition of our present piece below are not sufficiently known. But based on some peripheral evidence we may be able to conjecture as to roughly what timeline during the Bāb's ministry it may have been composed. On the available evidence, the identity of its recipient is nearly impossible to determine. That stated, the list provided by MacEoin in *Sources* (190) regarding the contents of INBMC 67 places our piece as the fifth item in between a piece by the Bāb dealing with the *hajj* and one addressing a certain Shaykh Ḥassan regarding events in Irāq that simultaneously provides instructions to the Letters of the Living to proceed to Karbalā (in order to assemble for the possible *khurūj*?)<sup>60</sup> These are respectively the items (iv) and (vi) listed in that collection that appear to mainly include works from the 1844-1845 period of the *hajj* journey and the return to Iran (late summer 1844-May / June 1845). On p. 221 of our MS. DLI 12448 - that is, three items before our own piece, as per the scribe - we have a response to a question put by one Muḥammad Ibrāhim to the Bāb. The item immediately preceding ours, however, is the Bāb's well known early tract on the knowledge of the unseen (*ilm al-ghayb*), which is otherwise a commentary on a famous *hadīth* by Imām Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq on the subject.<sup>61</sup> So, for now, this would eliminate the aforementioned Muḥammad Ibrāhim as its target recipient. MacEoin locates this last commentary on the *hadīth* by Ja‘far as being one contemporaneous with the *Zayyūm al-Asmā'* (*Sources*, pp. 57-8); that is, May-June / July 1844. Here immediately following our own piece on p. 236 of *DLI 12448* is to be found a prayer that concludes

<sup>58</sup> This partial translation first appeared as “*Alchemical Gnosis in Bābī-Bahā’ī Scripture: A Paper first read at a post-graduate seminar Univ. of Newcastle upon Tyne*” (UK), 1984, and can now be found on his website, at, <http://www.hurqalya.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/BAHA%27-ALLAH/TB-PHILOSOPHER%27S%20STONE.htm> (accessed 22 April 2011).

<sup>59</sup> <http://www.hurqalya.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/o3-THE%20BAB/KHUTBAS%20BAB/o1-Khutba%20%60ilm%20al-huruf.htm> (accessed 22 April 2011).^

<sup>60</sup> ^For details of the Bābī *khurūj* (millenarian insurrection) in the Irāqī Shī‘ite holy land that never transpired, see *Resurrection and Renewal: The Making of the Babi Movement in Iran, 1844-50, 1947; 212; 324-5.*^

<sup>61</sup> ^This is the famous *hadīth al-jarrīya* narrated by Ṣadīr which can be found in Kulaynī, vol. 1 (Tehran, 1392 / 1972-73), 495-96. According to *Sources* (p. 58) only “six surviving manuscripts” remain of the Bāb’s commentary on this *hadīth*. Both of our MSS. contain a copy of it, now increasing this number to eight. More are sure to follow, if they haven’t been already since MacEoin first wrote.^

on p. 238. Overall it is not apparent to us what, if any, method the scribe has employed in constructing a chronological timeline of these works in his compilation so that one may be gleaned from it. Yet most of the identified works of this compilation appear to come from mostly that 1844-5 period.

Bay.B38 confounds further possible attempts at precise location. It places our piece as the seventeenth item amongst a group of twenty-four that the scribe has marked as being responses to a presumably chronological list of questions. The first of these items (beginning at folio 126) is the Bāb's commentary on 'Ali's reiteration of the Delphic maxim. The item immediately preceding ours (and marked the sixteenth question, beginning at folio 178) commences by addressing questions of health, sickness and ritual purity (*tāhara*) before proceeding into an acrostic prayer. In this last item the scribe appears to have condensed several shorter pieces into one. Lambden provides a text of the acrostic prayer (but without identifying his MS.) together with an incomplete English translation on his website.<sup>62</sup> The item following ours in this collection is a very short piece consisting of a single paragraph addressing theodicy and sickness (folio 182-3). As mentioned, our own piece occurs on folios 181-2.

These issues stated, we speculate that our piece is generally located in the 1845-6 period from either during the *hajj* journey or immediately thereafter, but before the Bāb's flight from Shīrāz to Isfahān (late summer 1845-September 1846). Until further conclusive evidence comes to light, for now we tentatively base this dating, first, on the ordering of INBMC 67, which deals with works from that general period of the Bāb's ministry; and, second, that the ordering followed by DLI 12448's scribe has placed this work alongside one of the Bāb's earliest, not to mention the fact that the majority of the works in this compilation are specifically from that period. We will emphasize this point, however, that this identification is tentative, at best, if not altogether superficial, because the general state of paratextual disarray where Bābī MSS. timelines are concerned is such that it often confutes many attempts presently at locating these precisely, let alone conclusively identifying their recipients; that is, unless actual autographs should appear someday that precisely date them. We hope this situation will change in coming years and there are hopeful indications at present that it might.

We have divided this semi-critical translation into numbered passages, breaking it down into exactly twenty-eight in total, basing our passaging upon the text of Bay.B38. Where this occurs, the numbering indicates the beginning of each passage. Arabic transliterations have been placed inside round brackets (), as well as *italicized*, with insertions of needed wording placed inside square brackets []. All transliterations of divine names and attributes from Arabic, Latin words or neologisms have been *italicized*. The footnotes indicate the variant readings from the MSS. and offer glosses.

## Text

In the Name of God the Compassionate, the Merciful!<sup>63</sup>

<sup>62</sup> <http://www.hurqalya.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/o3-THE%20BAB/post%201844/ACROSTIC%20PRAYER-BAB.jpg> (text) (accessed 20 April 2011). <http://www.hurqalya.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/o3-THE%20BAB/post%201844/ACROSTIC%20PRAYER-BAB.htm> (translation) (accessed 20 April 2011).

<sup>63</sup> The opening benediction, the *bismillāh*, does not occur in Bay.B38 but is included in DLI 12448 (Pdf p. 233 final line, that is, the bottom of the page preceding the scan of the page displayed here). Bay.B38 simply has

As for the question regarding the science of letters (*'ilm al-huriūf*): take at the head of every ten the first letter [2] and calculate it by the first element of Fire (*nār*) around the name of God “*the Constrictor*” (*al-qābiḍ*); and in the second element of Air (*hawā'*) around the name of God “*the Living*” (*al-hayy*); and in the third element of Water (*mā'*) around the name of God “*the Revivifier*” (*al-muhayyi*); and in the fourth element of Earth (*turāb*) [4] around the name of God the “*Taker of Life*” (*al-mumīt*). Then multiply the ten letters from the first to the fourth and from the third to [6] the second. Then deduct seven and evaluate by seven. Afterwards ye will observe from the twenty-nine [lunar] mansions<sup>64</sup> (*manāzil*), commensurate with the science (*'ilm*) of their astrological houses (*al-nujūm*), according to the letter of Fire, the valuation of [8] Fire; and Air, the valuation of Air; and Water, the valuation of Water; and Earth, the valuation of Earth. This is the point of knowledge and its key that you will emerge from towards the path of the straight line (*khaṭṭ*)<sup>65</sup> of that gate. [10] There ye will find the Great [Sovereign] Angel (*malak al-kabīr*),<sup>66</sup> for that is the talismanic resolution that is [found] in the books of the Christians the likeness of which was not found until now amongst the *talismanic-lunettes* [i.e. *aqlām*, the occult pens]. So protect it with an utmost protection; and if [12] a result does not follow, do not be dismayed nor consider this to be a setback,<sup>67</sup> for verily indeed God will reveal from this [failure] the [true] *talismanic-lunette* according to the book. And neither is there humidity (*rutab*) nor aridity (*yābis*) other than what has been [14] recorded<sup>68</sup> in that book.

As for the question regarding the Elixir (*iksīr*): understand that<sup>69</sup> God has not cre-

السؤال السابع والعشر “*the seventeenth question*”.

<sup>64</sup> Two scribes in two separate MSS. have التاسعة والعشرين and this is certainly noteworthy since the Bāb appears to be weighing in on a longstanding debate among Muslim occultists and on the side of the twelfth century Tunisian polymath of the *arcana*, Shaykh Aḥmad al-Būnī who proposed (that is, if the ئ be considered the twenty-ninth letter of the Arabic alphabet, or twenty-eighth when ي be made the twenty-ninth) the number of lunar mansions to be twenty-nine, see *Shams al-Ma'ārif al-Kubrā* (the Great Sun of Gnoes) (Beirut: *Mu'assasah al-Nūr lil-Maqbū'at*, 1420 / 1999), 10. This is usually not the case with some notable occult and astrological texts from the Islamic east, and neither is it the position of Pseudo-Majrītī either in the *Picatrix* (*ghāyat al-ḥakīm*).<sup>65</sup>

<sup>65</sup> In DLI 12448 but not in Bay.B38. One has سبل الخط المستقيم while the other has (the straight path).

<sup>66</sup> Or “Great Sovereign / King” (*malik al-kabīr*). However, we prefer reading *malak* rather than *mālik* simply because all such operations in the manuals of Islamic white magic (*rūḥāniyya*), as well as in Islamic alchemy (*al-kīmiyyā'*), usually involve an encounter with an Angel or spirit guardian (*muwwakil*) of some rank or description during the actual course of an operation. Of course it goes without saying that in this general perspective each *malak* (angel) is often also regarded a *malik* (sovereign king) in its own specific domain within the greater hierarchy of its own administering rank and station. Without wishing to cite copious references here from various sources on angelology (Islamic or otherwise), we refer the general reader to Corbin's most illuminating discussion of this subject – a discussion on angelology that in our opinion has not been superseded - in the second chapter of *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, Bollingen Series LXVI, 1968; reprinted 1988), 46-122.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>67</sup> لا تختزن ولا تظنن DLI 12448. Bay.B38 only has فَلَا تَخْرُنْ وَ لَا تَظْنَنْ.

<sup>68</sup> DLI 12448 has مسيرة with a ت rather than with a ط as in Bay.B38. We disagree with DLI 12448's phrasing here.<sup>69</sup>

<sup>69</sup> ان الله Bay.B38 فاعرض ان الله 12448.

ated anything without also fashioning within it a letter of the Elixir in accordance with its station (*maqām*).<sup>70</sup> As for its hidden realities (*haqā’iq*): [16] journey with me unto the Divine Throne (*‘arsh*) until thou hast gone beyond it with the [divine] assistance vouchsafed unto thee [and] until ye have witnessed the Fire of that Most Great Name of God (*ism allāh al-akbar*),<sup>71</sup> letting it flare up with a blaze (*ashta ‘alhu*) by the rending of the [18] veil (*kashf al-hijāb*)<sup>72</sup> of the inmost *subtilised heart-flux* (*fu’ād*).<sup>73</sup>

<sup>70</sup> ^Or “existential rank”.^

<sup>71</sup> ^DLI 12448 has this specific phrasing. Bay.B38 simply has اسماً الْأَكْبَرُ (the Most Great Name). We have preferred this one because Lambden indicates it per INBMC 67. We note this is just another way of saying the Greatest Name. See above.^

<sup>72</sup> Lambden’s translation has this line of the passage as “*to remove the covering (al-ḥā’ib)*.” Neither one of our two MSS. has this. Instead both have كشف الحجاب (to rend / the rending of the veil). Since we do not have access to the text of INBMC 67 we cannot compare the disparity here; but the identical phrasing of this line in both of our two MSS. should be noted for any future comparisons and in establishing any final critical texts of the original Arabic because this changes both its thrust and its subtle meaning.

<sup>73</sup> ^*Fu’ād* is a technical term in the lexicon of Shaykhī (and by extension, Bābī) thought replete with significance denoting a meaning beyond just a mere synonym for “heart” (*qalb*). Idris Samawi Hamid’s quite insightful rendering of *fu’ād* as “*heart-flux*” I have qualified further as “*subtilised heart-flux*”, see *The Metaphysics and Cosmology of Process According to Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsā’ī* (Buffalo: Ph.D. dissertation, State University of New York at Buffalo, 1998), where he notes, ‘...*fu’ād* is more specialized than the heart itself, and... *a notion of motion or flux is fundamental to its meaning* (my *italics*)...with Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsā’ī *fu’ād* is more specialized than the *qalb*,’ 101. Therefore, in its Shaykhī–Bābī denotation both these terms (“*qalb*” and “*fu’ād*”) carry far more multifaceted and expanded implications than usually assumed on first glance or otherwise gleaned from the definitions provided in Sufi technical handbooks. Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsā’ī (d. 1826), for instance, appears to make the overall metaphysical function of *fu’ād* simultaneously cosmological as well as ontological turning *fu’ād* into the animating function of “*being / existence*” (*wujūd*) itself. In the very First Observation of his *Fawā’id al-Hikmiya* (*Subtilised Heart-Fluxual Observations of Wisdom*) he states outright that *fu’ād* is “*being / existence*” (and as Hamid points out, he is speaking of *wujūd* in its non-delimited and universal sense), 277. To wit, “*The [subtilised] heart-flux is the highest of all of [humanity’s] loci of cognition. It is the light of [God] which He [the Prophet] (upon whom be peace) mentioned in his dictum: ‘Beware of the penetration of the faithful; for [he / she] contemplates through the light of God. It is existence because existence is the highest orientation of [humanity], that is, [its] direction in orientation is to [its] Lord, because existence does not contemplate itself at all but rather [it contemplates] its Lord; just as essence does not contemplate its Lord at all but rather [it contemplates] itself*” [slightly modified translation from Hamid’s]. The scriptural root of this word as a technical term, of course, originates with Qur’ān 53:11 (*al-najm*, “The Star”), i.e. “*the [subtilised] heart[-flux] hath not lied regarding what it hath seen,*” which refers to the Prophet’s nocturnal ascension (*mi’rāj*) and his beholding of the Divine Face at “...two bow-lengths or nearer” (*qāba qawsayni aw adnā*) (53:9). In light of this, we shall offer our schematization of the hierarchy of the subtle physiology of the heart in Shaykhism and in Bābism as follows (ascending): 1. *qalb* (heart) 2. *bātin* (interior), 3. *suwaydā’* (core), 4. *habbat* (kernel), 5. *sirr* (secret) and 6. *fu’ād* (subtilised heart-flux = existence / being). The level of *fu’ād* is the level at which per the traditions of the Imāms we can speak of the “*Hero-Intelligence*” (i.e. the *‘aql*). Our comments here should also be contextualized in light of Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsā’ī’s doctrine of alchemy, the double *okhémá* and the physiology of the resurrection body as detailed in Henry Corbin’s *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth: From Mazdean Iran to Shi’ite*

Then place the *retorta* (*al-qar'*) upon the rim of the alembic (*ambīq*)<sup>74</sup> and take from the fruit of the Tree emerging from the Mount Sina'i of the Exclusive Oneness (*tūr al-sīnā' al-ahad*)<sup>75</sup> unto the limit of the [Divine] Power (*al-qadr*)<sup>76</sup> within the [20] mystery of the [Divine] Predomination (*al-muqtadir*),<sup>77</sup> and allow it to fall<sup>78</sup> into its place (*awṣiluhā ilā maḥalihā*). There [in that *locus*] you shall find the Most Great Crimon Oil (*duhn al-ahmar al-akbar*)<sup>79</sup> [emerge] from this [Siniatic] Fire (*al-nār*) more swiftly than the twinkling of an eye (*aqrab min lamḥ al-baṣar*). In that *situs*,<sup>80</sup> [22] towards God (*ilā allāh*), you are the very sign of God (*āyat allāh*)<sup>81</sup> and likewise throughout all the worlds according to its capacity (*bi-ḥasibi*); that is, until the culmination of the matter<sup>82</sup> (*al-amr*) unto [the limit of] the mineral world ('ālam al-jamād). [Wherefore] have we concealed from revealing<sup>83</sup> (*khifnā min al-azhār*) [this secret] from the gaze of all those contemplating (*lil-nāzirin*) upon the penetrative [metaphysical] subtlety<sup>84</sup> of divergent contrariness (*mash'ar al-aḍdād*),<sup>85</sup>

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*Iran*, 180-221; this, since if the subtle physiology as detailed by Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsā'i be divided into a basic ternary scheme (and further augmented) as *jism*, *jasad* and *rūḥ* we may then correspond *qalb* to *jism* 1, *bātin* to *jism* 2, *suwaydā'* to *jasad* 1, *habbat* to *jasad* 2, *sirr* to *rūḥ* 1 and *fu'ād* to *rūḥ* 2. See Moezzi, *passim*, and especially *Basā'ir al-Darajāt* (the Degrees of the Apperceptions) for the special technical meaning of *rūḥ* in the esoteric teachings of the Imāms. In the *Persian Bayān* 2:5 the basic quaternary scheme of the subtle body laid out by the Bāb (in descending order) is *fu'ād* (subtilised heart-flux), *rūḥ* (spirit), *nafs* (soul) and *jism* (body). This should demonstrate that, like Shaykh Aḥmad, the Bāb likewise considered the *fu'ād* to be the highest organ of perception.<sup>^</sup>

<sup>74</sup> DLI 12448 has العَيْنَ ("the eyes"). Given the context, and apparently as also seems to appear in INBMC 67 as well, we hold Bay.B38 as the correct wording here.

<sup>75</sup> DLI 12448 طُور السِّينَايَةِ الْاَحَدِ الْقَدْرِ ("the Mount Sina'i of the Exclusive Oneness of the Divine Power / Destiny"). We don't know whether or not the scribe has misread على حدَّ (unto to the limit) for الْاَحَدِ (the Exclusive Oneness). Nevertheless we have kept its phrasing up to الْاَحَدِ and combined it with Bay.B38's على حدَّ (unto to the limit), reading the line as Bay.B38 has it from there onwards.

<sup>76</sup> ^Or "Destiny".<sup>^</sup>

<sup>77</sup> ^Per INBMC 67 (according to Lambden), which has *al-qadīr fi sirr al-qadr*; Lambden has rendered this part of the passage as "...the Divine Power in [the midmost heart] of the Divine Destiny [Power]." Both of our mss. have ^القدر في سر المقدار.

<sup>78</sup> ^Or "pour".<sup>^</sup>

<sup>79</sup> DLI 12448 has misread دهن (oil) altogether and by dropping the د has written instead هن ("to weep" or "sigh"). As per Lambden, INBMC 67 has دهن. DLI 12448's phrasing here does not make sense, in any case.

<sup>80</sup> ^Our rendering for هنالك.<sup>^</sup>

<sup>81</sup> ^DLI 12448 has انت آية الله ("thou art God"). Bay. B38 has which also seems to appear in INBMC 67. We have rephrased the sequence of the line of the passage from the original here somewhat. Lambden has "In that place you are the very 'sign of God' both before God and towards God." We don't necessarily disagree with his reading. However, unless there is additional wording in INBMC 67 which isn't in ours, ("الى الله, الى / towards God") simply means just that and this precise phrasing, without any additional wording, occurs in both of our mss.<sup>^</sup>

<sup>82</sup> ^Even "cause" or "command". Namely, the *Opus*.<sup>^</sup>

<sup>83</sup> ^Or "presenting".<sup>^</sup>

<sup>84</sup> ^Or "mark" as Lambden has it.<sup>^</sup>

<sup>85</sup> ^Lambden has this line of the passage as, "Wherefore have We concealed from the vision of such as gaze towards that which bears the marks of contrariness..."

[24] and have established it there,<sup>86</sup> in that leaf (*waraqa*), the secret of the two [cosmic] lines (*sāṭrayn*) contained within the two mysteries [of depth]<sup>87</sup> (*sīrrayn*) that perchance someone may apprehend it;<sup>88</sup> and sufficient is God by the Proof<sup>89</sup> as witness to the truth (*kaftya bi-Llāhi bi-l-hujjati ‘ali-l-ḥaqq shahīdan*).<sup>90</sup> And if you truly comprehend [this affair], [26] you will be able to undertake the Art of the Elixir (*sana’ al-iksīr*) and in that *locus* truly grasp the reality of the matter (*haqīqat al-amr*).<sup>91</sup> And this is [an issue] well-known in the presence of one whom God has made to witness the creation of [28] Heaven and earth, and the creation of His *Logos-Self*,<sup>92</sup> for no power and no strength is there save in God, the Soaringly High, the Mighty!<sup>93</sup> Glorified be God above what is attributed to Him, and praised be God, the Lord of all the worlds!

86 Bay. B38 has it as في ذلك اعتمد. DLI 12448 has it as above. Lambden has it as, “have laid it down ...there,” which tends to support the same reading as in DLI 12448 which is اعنهـت.

87 ^Per Lambden.^

88 ^Here Lambden includes a line that does not occur in either one of our two mss. To wit, “*Thus bath He taught Us [the elixorial mysteries]...*”^

89 ^Namely, the Báb himself.^

90 ^DLI 12448 has the conjunction و (“and”) after كفي بالله (sufficient is God). Bay. B38 does not.^

91 ^Even “*reality of the cause-command*”.^

92 ^A technical term replete throughout the writings of the Báb (and one with some *Ismā’īlī* connotations as well) is *nafs allāh*. Literally this denotes the *self*, or even *anima*, of God. Stephen Lambden has consistently translated this term as *Logos-Self* and we fully concur with his quite beautiful rendering. In the theophanology of the Báb this term denotes the divine “*messenger-prophet*” (*rasūl / nabi*), *vicegerent-providential guide* (*wāli*) and *legatee* (*wāṣī*) as the manifestation of the Primal Will (*mashī'a al-ūlā*). Elsewhere in the universe of Islamic gnosis this would be classified as the Universal Intellect ('*aql kull*) or *Pen* (*qalam*). A corollary to this term in the Báb’s diction is *point* (*nuqta*).^

93 ^Bay. B38 does not have العظيم (the Mighty). Both MSS. have placed a *shadda* over the ل of العـلـي (the High), i.e., العـلـي, thereby intensifying the tense.^

Earth	Water	Air	Fire
The Taker of Life ( <i>al-mumît</i> )	The Revivifier ( <i>al-muhayyi</i> )	The Living ( <i>al-hayy</i> )	The Constrictor ( <i>al-qâbid</i> )
غ	ق	ي	أ
ج	ر	ك	ب
م	د	ش	ل
ث	ن	ه	ت
ز	خ	س	و
ف	ح	ذ	ع
ظ	ص	ط	ض

Figure 2: Table of the Elemental, Divine Name and Letter correspondences

**MS. Bay.B38**

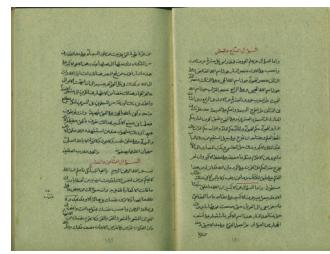


Figure 3: MS. Bay.B38

Ms. DLI 12448

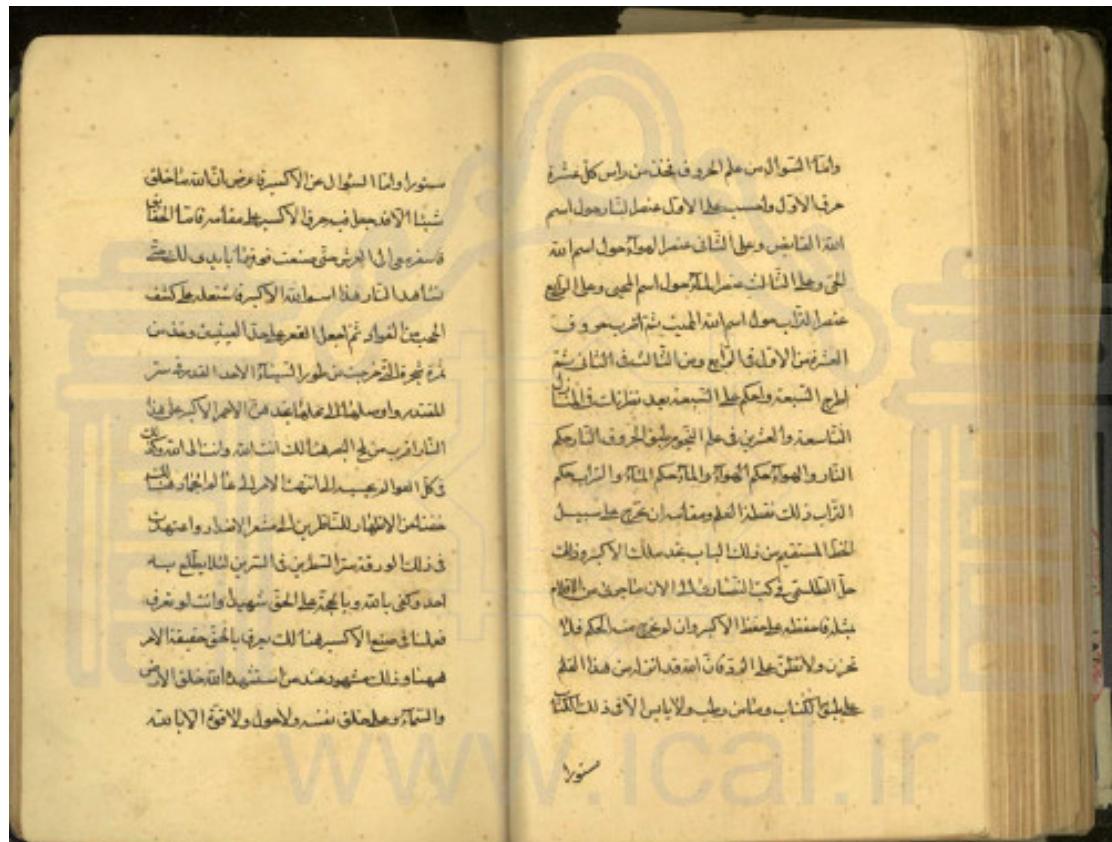


Figure 4: MS. Bay.B38

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